

**Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant Program
Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control,
River and Coastal Protection Act of 2006 (Proposition 84)**

County: PLUMAS

Applicant: FEATHER RIVER LAND TRUST

Project Title: HEART K RANCH

Reference Number: SNC 070194

PROJECT SCOPE

The Feather River Land Trust acquired 884 acres, known as the Heart K Ranch, in Genesee Valley in December 2006. The purchase price was \$2.575 million, covered by a 3-year bridge loan from the Packard Foundation. This project would help retire the bridge loan debt incurred in connection with the acquisition of this important property. The Heart K Ranch drains an area of approximately 350,000 acres and includes approximately 2.5 miles of Indian Creek, a major tributary to the North Fork Feather River. The ranch is a working landscape, with ongoing livestock grazing under a management system designed to protect riparian values. The property has extensive riparian values and a diverse assemblage of wildlife, fish, and avian species, including 21 special status species that are found on the ranch property. Once the loan debt is retired, the applicant will be able to free up funds to begin restoration efforts in partnership with Plumas County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, the Feather River CRM, and the Plumas National Forest.

Steps leading to the successful completion of this project include:

- Retire debt on acquisition loan.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

DETAILED PROJECT DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE
Raise additional funds to complete pay-off of loan	November 2008
Retire Loan with Packard Foundation	December 31, 2008
Initiate Restoration Activities	January 2009
Final Report/Final Payment Request	December 2008

PROJECT COSTS

PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES	TOTAL SNC FUNDING
SNC Contribution to retirement of debt	\$1,000,000
GRAND TOTAL	\$1,000,000\$

Letters of Support:

- None Received

Recommendation:

Staff recommendation is to fund the partial retirement of debt at the requested level of \$1,000,000.

2. ☐ Project Summary. Feather River Land Trust: Heart K Ranch Project

The Feather River Land Trust recently (12/27/06) acquired the ±884-acre Heart K Ranch in Genesee Valley using a \$2.575 million, 3-year bridge loan from the Packard Foundation. Bridge financing enabled FRLT to act quickly to prevent the sale of the property to multiple buyers, protecting traditional public access and Maidu cultural sites, and buying time for FRLT to pursue its long-term goals of conserving and restoring the property's incredible riparian and water resources, biodiversity, and other public conservation values. The Heart K Ranch drains an area of approximately 350,000 acres and includes approximately 2.5 miles of Indian Creek, a major tributary to the North Fork Feather River. The property's extensive riparian areas support cottonwood-willow and riverine habitats and a diverse assemblage of wildlife, including six species of native fish, river otters, and willow flycatchers (21 special status species in all). Other habitats found on the property include black oak woodland, montane meadow, and mature mixed-conifer forest. The Heart K is surrounded on the east, north, and south by USFS land, providing excellent landscape connectivity and compatible management.

In addition to paying off the PRI, the Heart K Ranch Project features stream and riparian restoration along Indian Creek. Restoration efforts will include fencing off the floodplain area from cattle, planting riparian vegetation, improving fish habitat, removing invasive plant species, repairing the property's aging irrigation system, and exploring the feasibility of dedicating water instream for ecological benefit. We estimate that we will be able to improve the irrigation system from <10% efficiency to >90% efficiency, enabling FRLT to dedicate up to 1,500 acre-feet per year instream (of the property's 2,000-acre-feet of adjudicated surface water rights), cooling water temperatures and improving riverine habitat both within and below the property. FRLT recently received exciting news that many of the above restoration activities would be funded by a Prop 50 IRWMP grant, which FRLT plans to implement in partnership with the Plumas County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, the Feather River CRM, and the Plumas National Forest.

FRLT intends to own the Heart K and to manage the property in a variety of innovative ways that would help achieve all seven SNC Program Goals and serve as a model for other conservation projects in the Sierra. If FRLT is able to pay back the PRI, unique aspects of FRLT's management will include (note that all of the following are already underway): conducting outdoor education in partnership with the Plumas Unified School District and Mountain Maidu, supporting the local economy and ranching heritage by leasing the property to local ranchers and paying property taxes, providing ecologically-compatible public recreation (including trails and interpretive signage), restoring the property's historic barns, partnering with Plumas County and others to conduct a carbon sequestration pilot study, pursuing dedicating water instream, implementing and monitoring a variety of stream restoration activities, working with Plumas Fire Safe to conduct timber stand improvement and hazardous fuels reduction, and working with the Maidu to integrate traditional ecological knowledge into the property's management. FRLT's efforts to conserve and restore the Heart K have enjoyed outstanding public support, as dozens of volunteers help manage the property, local students have begun using the property for outdoor education (lead by local volunteers), and a variety of local agencies, including Plumas County, the Feather River CRM, Plumas Fire Safe, Trout Unlimited, Plumas Audubon and others have begun to partner with FRLT on projects. The community's love for the Heart K, coupled with its outstanding conservation values, make the property an ideal place to engage the local community and general public in education, stewardship, and conservation and we have been amazed by how people have responded to the property.

The first step in continuing the above projects and securing the associated community benefits in the long run is to pay off the Packard PRI by December 2009. We look forward to working with the SNC to make this happen and are requesting \$1.0 million from the SNC to help pay back the PRI.*

*The total project cost is \$4.03 million, generally itemized as follows: PRI payoff (includes interest) = \$2.575 million; riparian, stream, and invasive species restoration = \$741,000; stewardship endowment for ongoing management and restoration = \$500,000; preacquisition costs = \$62,000; establishment of educational program with PUSD and Maidu = \$50,000; restoration of historic structures = \$100,000.